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HAARETZ

ENGLISH EDITION
הארץ

Friday, December 1, 2017 | Kislev 13, 5778. Vol 98/29977

ISRAEL'S LEADING DAILY NEWSPAPER

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Police pay the price of drawing out the investigations of PM

Gidi Weitz

Australian businessman James Packer's statement to Australian investigators this week carried a heavy price for Israeli law enforcement, for dragging its feet on the investigations involving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Allegations that Packer and the Israeli-American movie mogul Arnon Milchan had heaped gifts and other favors on Netanyahu and his wife Sara reached the police, State Prosecutor Shai Nitzan and Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit as early as the summer of 2016. The jet-setting Packer was in Israel for the High Holy Days that fall.

Yet despite fairly clear suspicions of inappropriate ties with Netanyahu, Israeli law enforcement played into Packer's hands by not urgently calling him in to give a statement. Packer was able to disappear, thumb his nose at investigators, sail his yacht to South America, prepare himself thoroughly for the interview and set the terms under which he would agree to talk.

All for Netanyahu

Yossi Verter, Page 5

"We're leaving no stone unturned," Nitzan has said repeatedly when asked why the investigations involving Netanyahu are taking so long. The problem is that before he and his people can get around to turning the stones, some of the snakes underneath have already managed to flee.

This snail's pace has made it possible for suspects to burnish their stories and trade intelligence. It has eliminated the element of surprise and created an opening for claims of delayed justice. It's also responsible for the neck-and-neck race between the police and MKs David Bitan and David Amsalem — the former to publish their conclusions from the investigations, and the latter to pass legislation that would forbid publishing those conclusions.

As far as is known, Packer told police that he denies having given any gifts or favors whatsoever to the Netanyahus. This self-protective posture is the diametric opposite of Milchan's testimony when he arrived at the police's Lahav 433 unit for

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Benjamin Netanyahu sitting in the Knesset earlier this month. *Ronen Zvulun / Reuters*

Man stabbed to death in Arad in suspected terror attack

Josh Breiner and Almog Ben Zikri

A man was stabbed to death in the southern Israeli town of Arad on Thursday evening in a suspected terror attack.

Police were searching for suspects, who were thought to have fled the scene.

The man, found unconscious at a bus stop by attending paramedics, was in his twenties. Attempts to revive him were unsuccessful.

"When we arrived at the scene a young man in his twenties was found lying unconscious without a pulse, and was not breathing, with stab wounds to his upper body," a Magen David Adom emergency service spokesperson said.

On Friday two weeks ago, a Palestinian ran over two people in Gush Etzion, injuring one person seriously. The assailant, a 17-year-old from Hebron, was shot by security forces and seriously injured.

Israel's views on Iranian presence in Syria get even more muddled

Amos Harel

"There is no Iranian military force in Iran," said Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman on Tuesday in an interview with the Ynet website. "Iran is not on our border. It's true that there are some experts and advisers, but there is no military force there."

Are you confused? So are we. This is not the same Lieberman who only two weeks ago, while visiting the army's Northern Command, warned that "Israel would not allow an entrenchment of Shi'ite and Iranian forces in Syria. Anyone who doesn't understand what I mean would do well to try and understand." And didn't Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu say last August, at the end of a cabinet meeting, that "wherever ISIS exits Iran enters," declaring that Israel strenuously objects to Iran and its satellites firming up their grip there?

Two weeks later, at a meeting with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, Netanyahu claimed that Iran was building facilities for producing accurate missiles in Syria and Lebanon. Even Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot, who is usually very cautions, said recently in an interview to the online Saudi newspaper Elaph that Israel demands that Iran and its Shi'ite militias pull back in Syria at least to the east of the Damascus-Sweida highway, which lies 37 miles from the border with Israel in the Golan Heights. "We won't allow any Iranian presence. We've warned them not to build plants or military bases [there]," Eisenkot added.

The stream of announcements made by Israel is unclear. Are the Iranians already in southern Syria, and if so, in what capacity – as advisers attached to Shi'ite militias or as organic units of the Revolutionary Guard?

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Archaeologist Michal Haber with finds at the site. *Gil Cohen-Magen*

Drone spots 2,200-year-old Edomite temple in live-fire zone

Ruth Schuster and Nir Hasson

Archaeologists using drones have found what seems to be a rare Edomite temple dating to 2,200 years ago, smack in the middle of a live-fire zone. The structure seems to have been destroyed by Jewish forces, possibly under Judah Maccabee himself, who then converted the surviving locals.

The structure could be a temple, or a palace, and in any case seems to have been destroyed in one of the incessant upheavals of the region. In this case, the building, evidently a large one, may have been destroyed during the Hasmonean conquest of the region in 112 B.C.E. Following the Hasmonean victory, the locals were forced to convert to Judaism.

The structure was found on a hill at Horvat 'Amuda, in the Lachish region. After decades of being barred from the site because of its use for military training, excavation commenced a couple of months ago and uncovered this structure, from the Hellenistic period.

Very few structures, temples or otherwise, have been found that can be associated with the Edomites (also known as the Idumeans), explain the excavation directors, Dr. Oren Gutfeld of the Hebrew University, and Pablo Betzer and Michal Haber

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Palestinians attack Israeli hikers; one Palestinian shot dead

Jack Khoury, Yotam Berger and Yaniv Kubovich

A Palestinian man was shot and killed Thursday morning by a Jewish settler near the West Bank village of Qusra. From conversations with three witnesses to the incident and two sources close to the investigation, Haaretz has learned that dozens of Palestinians surrounded a group of Israeli youths hiking in the area and threw rocks at them. One of the adults accompanying the youths drew his gun and said he fired in the air.

The Israeli army said the Palestinian man died as a result of this shooting, yet a source in the Israel Police said it is unclear what the army was basing this claim on. He added that the investigation is still in its initial phases, and that the Palestinian's body will be sent to an autopsy.

The Palestinian Health Ministry said the man who was killed, 48-year-old Mahmoud Zael Oudeh, was shot

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